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# The Outlook for President Pak And South Korea's Dissidents (C)

An Intelligence Assessment

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The author of this paper is [REDACTED] East  
Asia/Pacific Division, Office of Political Analysis. It  
has been coordinated with the Office of Economic  
Research and the National Intelligence Officer for  
East Asia and Pacific. Questions and comments  
may be addressed to the author at [REDACTED] (U)

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# **The Outlook for President Pak And South Korea's Dissidents**

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## **The Outlook for President Pak And South Korea's Dissidents (C)**

### **Key Judgments**

President Pak Chong-hui's government has come through another spring—historically the time for increased antigovernment activities in South Korea—without serious trouble or large-scale protests from the country's dissidents. Earlier this year, Pak's security advisers were concerned that the release from prison of Pak's longtime adversary, Kim Tae-chung, would encourage greater political unrest this spring. They also feared that the country's high inflation rate and the prospect of President Carter's visit to Seoul this summer would further embolden human rights activists. (C)

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The failure of the underlying malaise to disrupt domestic tranquility in South Korea so far reflects inherent weaknesses of the dissident movement, including the inability of Pak's critics to articulate goals with broad appeal in Korea. Beyond this, the massive precautions taken by government security forces to head off disturbances and the positive economic and political initiatives the Pak government has taken to strengthen key bases of support—initiatives that have recently been receiving greater recognition from foreign observers of Korea—have been especially important. (S NF)

The "Saemaul Movement"—a multifaceted government program that promotes both economic development and grass-roots political participation—has been an especially successful mechanism of the Pak government in strengthening support in the countryside. Pak's overall management of the country's rapid economic growth has also fostered the emergence of a more influential urban middle class in Korea, which, for the most part, supports Pak and has a growing stake in the political and economic status quo. (C)

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As he begins his 18th year as South Korea's national leader, Pak seems fully capable of retaining his firm grip on power into the 1980s. Pak is not invulnerable, however; if he should suffer from a major policy failure—a severe down turn in the economy, another escalating crisis in relations with the United States, a mishandling of some other key national security issue, or an overreaction to dissident activities—the now diffuse signs of domestic dissatisfaction could coalesce, and Pak might not have a sufficiently deep reservoir of support to maintain his political position. (C)

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## The Outlook for President Pak And South Korea's Dissidents (C)

### *The Dissidents' Base of Support*

The essential problem faced by South Korea's dissidents remains how to marshal popular support beyond the relatively small circle of students, Christian activists, and intellectuals who are active primarily in Seoul. Some dissident leaders felt that conditions conducive to broadening their movement were beginning to develop early this year. In their view, these included:

**The return of Kim Tae-chung.** Kim is an able speaker and talented politician who has been in and out of prison for alleged political crimes since 1971, when he nearly defeated Pak in the presidential election. When Kim was released by Pak late last year, South Korean dissidents hoped that Kim's presence would provide their movement with badly needed leadership.

**Inflation.** South Korea's dissidents have been frustrated in recent years by the country's economic boom but, with inflation rising at a 20-percent annual rate, some believed that they finally had a bread-and-butter issue they could exploit politically.

**The ROK-US Summit.** Few Korean dissidents believe that the meeting between Presidents Carter and Pak will prompt any major liberalization in Seoul, but some evidently hoped that Pak would avoid harsh repressive measures to ensure a smooth summit, thereby creating better opportunities for them to challenge the system.

**Iran.** Only Pak's most extreme opponents see advantages in fostering the kind of upheaval that took place in Iran. Even so, a wider spectrum of dissidents has taken heart from the fact that a figure as powerful as the Shah could be unseated. (C)

Despite these developments, dissident activity did not increase this spring. Kim Tae-chung is still a popular figure in South Korea; and his support appears to have helped Kim Yong-sam, an aggressive member of the National Assembly, to win the presidency of South Korea's major opposition political party. But since his release, Kim Tae-chung's activities often have been circumscribed by security officials, and some dissidents believe that his long years in confinement have reduced his political skills. Although popular concern

with inflation continues, Pak has moved to dissipate potential unrest by reshuffling his economic ministers and launching a highly publicized anti-inflation campaign. (C)

Dissident hopes that President Carter's visit would bring greater opportunities are also fading. On May Kim Tae-chung and other dissident leaders issued a statement opposing the summit on the grounds that it would provide support for President Pak's "dictatorial" rule rather than aid the cause of human rights. Finally, the movement's attention to events in Iran seems to be ebbing, although the perception of that trauma may have left a residue of feeling that Pak is not invulnerable in the longer term. (C)

For the present, the number of South Koreans who associate themselves with antigovernment statements, attend protest meetings, or are otherwise engaged in struggle against the Pak government, is small. Excluding the students, whose involvement in politics is intermittent, active dissenters probably number from the hundreds to perhaps a few thousand out of a population of some 37 million

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***Students, Christians, and Workers***

The dissident ranks can swell quickly when the university students mount demonstrations, as they often have after the winter vacation and the resumption of classes in March and April. The university students led the marches that unseated President Syngman Rhee in April 1960, and students and other activists organized sizable political protests in the latter 1960s and again in the early 1970s. The harshest criticism of Pak has often come from the university students in the Seoul area who now number more than 70,000. (C)

Many South Koreans, however, appear less sympathetic toward student demonstrators now than in earlier years. There are signs that the average Korean wage earner, who formerly tended to regard students as the "conscience of the nation," now sees student protest as a reflection of immaturity and lack of "real responsibilities." Moreover, many students who actively oppose the government while in college abandon their militancy after graduation when they join business firms or enter government service.

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South Korea's Christians, about 5 million people, or about 14 percent of the population, comprise another minority that plays a significant role in the Korean dissident movement. Church leaders have long had contact with US and European missionaries, and, like the students, they have been exposed to and attracted by Western political ideas. Selected Christian leaders have continued to speak out strongly against President Pak's authoritarian rule, although the established hierarchies of both the Protestant and Catholic churches generally have been reluctant to take a leading role in the dissident struggle in recent years. Christian militancy seems to have been dissipated both by the church's concern that excessive involvement in politics might result in a loss of privileges and by its grudging respect for Pak's accomplishments in improving general living standards. (C)

Over the years, dissident leaders have tried doggedly to enlist the participation of Korean industrial workers in the struggle for liberalization, but with only the barest glimmerings of success. Most skilled and unskilled Korean laborers see improvements in their status and appear more interested in upward economic mobility than in politics. The majority of these dissident activists still seem to come from the intelligentsia—writers, ex-professors, and journalists—and a small group of the more militant politicians and Christian leaders. (C)

***The Dissidents' Goals and Tactics***

The best known intellectuals among Pak's critics have been able to make their positions known in Korea, although government controls over political dissent, including continued—albeit informal—press censorship, have limited the dissemination of their views. For example, three prominent government critics—Kim Tae-chung; the elder statesman of the opposition, former President Yun Po-sun; and militant Protestant clergyman, Ham Sok-hwan—managed to issue a harsh antigovernment declaration to foreign journalists and a few Korean reporters shortly after the Korean Independence Day anniversary in early March. (C)

Catholic Cardinal Kim Su-hwan, another longtime prominent figure in the dissident movement, also strongly criticized the Pak government on 5 March in a sermon at the Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul. The opposition has often used that pulpit to express its views. A major anti-Pak manifesto in March 1976, for example, resulted in the prosecution of its 18 signers in a highly publicized trial. (C)

These dissident declarations, and more recent statements by new opposition leader Kim Yong-sam—which have not been reported fully in the Korean press—have reiterated several familiar themes:

- The 1972 authoritarian Yushin constitution has established a dictatorial system.
- The longer Pak remains in power, the greater the danger of a major upheaval in South Korea.
- The valued goals of anti-Communism, national security, and economic growth must not destroy democracy.



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*Kim Tae-chung, dissident leader  
upon his release from confinement  
in December 1978*

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- The present corrupt and exploitative regime would not be supported popularly if war broke out.
- The restoration of democracy should precede reunification.
- Negotiations with the North must be based on the moral strength stemming from real democracy at home. (U)

The dissidents' goals and concerns clearly demonstrate that Pak and his critics agree on important elements of Seoul's economic and defense policies. Their differences lie in their attitudes toward political freedom. Emergency Measure 9, which bans "false rumors" and any criticism of the authoritarian Yushin Constitution, is particularly disliked. Also condemned are the provisions of the constitution that permit Pak to appoint one-third of the membership of the national

legislature and to secure an unlimited number of six-year terms as president simply by obtaining the endorsement of a hand-picked electoral body. More recently, the continued detention by the Pak government of some 200 political prisoners, who were not released in the general amnesty late last year, has become a prominent issue. (C)

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There are conflicting reports on the specific tactics the dissidents will adopt this year. Kim Tae-chung and Yun po-sun, [REDACTED] outlined an ambitious plan for confrontations with the government, including coordinated nationwide student strikes, widescale labor agitation, and the formation of a broad front of various

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opposition groups.

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Kim Tae-chung's reentry into partisan politics recently suggests he is indeed interested in a more conventional approach. Kim's move marks a shift for South Korea's dissidents; in recent years, the dissidents have been scornful of the opposition New Democratic Party, criticizing it for saying that the present political system is unjust while, at the same time, participating in and profiting from that system. Now, Kim's involvement with the NDP raises the possibility of a broader cooperative relationship between a more moderate dissident movement and the opposition party. (S NF NC)

Such an alliance could have advantages and disadvantages for both partners. The dissidents might gain a measure of legality for their activities, greater publicity, and access to the National Assembly. The NDP image, in turn, could benefit substantially from an infusion of idealists, many of whom have served time in prison for their convictions. (S NF NC)

On the debit side, the dissidents would have to accept, however reluctantly, a measure of legitimacy for the present Korean political system, and the New Democrats would risk opening themselves up for retaliation should the dissidents press the party to challenge President Pak's authority. In any event, both the dissidents and the NDP will be held back by their narrow bases of support and their lack of success in identifying issues with broad appeal in Korea. (S NF NC)

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the main opposition group—the New Democratic Party (NDP)—outpolled the DRP by nearly 2 to 1; overall, the NDP won 32.8 percent of the vote, gaining an edge over the ruling camp for the first time. (S NF NC)

South Korean officials close to President Pak attempted to put the best public face on the election. They claimed that the substantial voter turnout—77 percent—showed that Korean voters took the election seriously. They noted that a democratic election had indeed taken place, and also pointed out that despite the overall popular vote, the DRP actually won more seats than its rival NDP, by 68 to 61. The officials emphasized that the election was one of the fairest in Korean history, [REDACTED]

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Additionally, Pak's supporters argued that real power and the direction of national policy were not actually at stake in the election and that, should an election involving these matters be held, the voters would give Pak a renewed mandate. (S NF NC)

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#### *The National Assembly Election*

[REDACTED]

South Koreans cast their votes in the 12 December National Assembly elections. Only 31.7 percent of the voters endorsed candidates explicitly identified with President Pak's ruling Democratic Republican Party (DRP)—6 percentage points less than the DRP received in the last assembly election in 1973. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] a growing number of Koreans believe that Seoul's rapid economic progress has followed the Japanese pattern, that there have been many changes in Japan's political leadership without any interruption of economic growth, and that development would continue in South Korea even with Pak absent from the scene. [REDACTED]

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In the major cities of Seoul and Pusan, [REDACTED]

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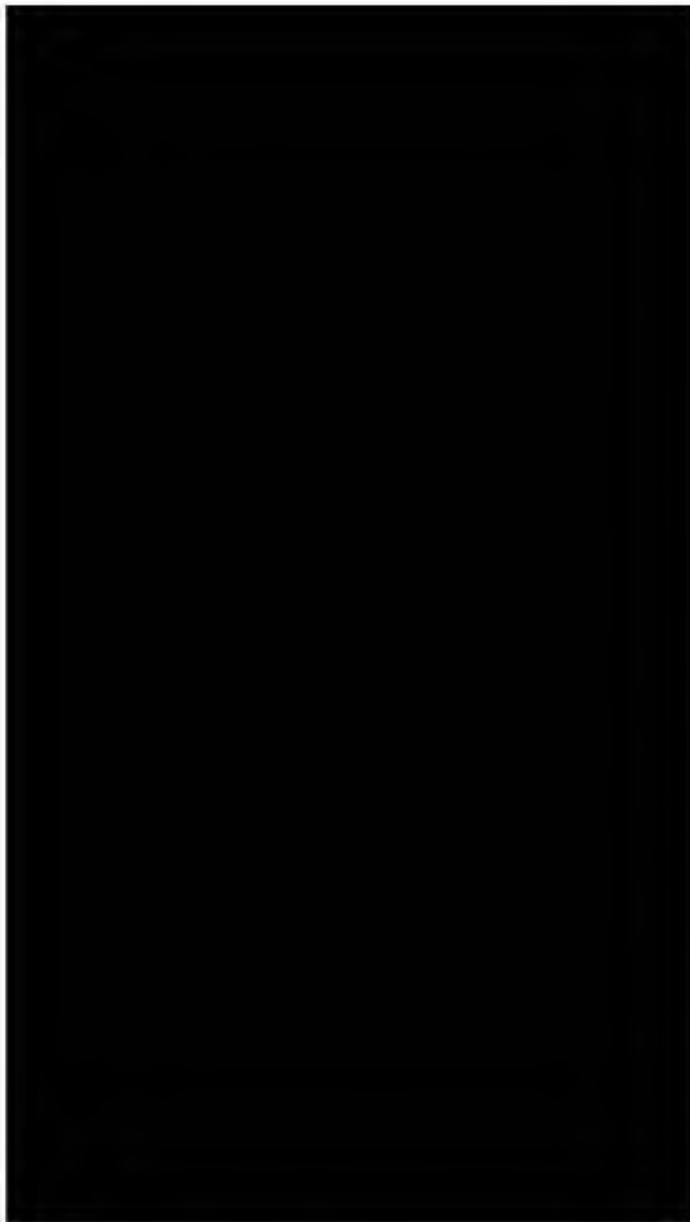
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military officers seized power in the spring of 1961, the consolidation of a stable political order—along with the defense of South Korea against North Korean attack or political subversion and the modernization of the South—has been a major goal. (S NF)

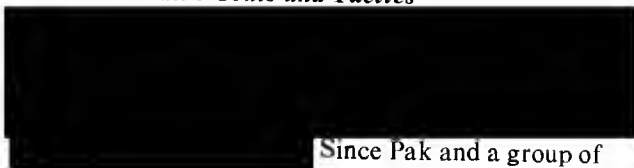
Government officials insist that political stability is a matter of national survival. Despite North Korea's publicly stated willingness to coexist with South Korea, Pyongyang continues to assert openly that it seeks to promote revolution in the South; it still infiltrates agents in support of that goal, and the North has also engaged in a large-scale buildup of its military forces in the 1970s. Seoul officials cite this North Korean record to support their claim that the threat from the North must be taken seriously. (S NF)

A disciplined society is in keeping with traditional Korea's deeply engrained Confucian-value system, which emphasizes the need for order, hierarchy, loyalty, and orthodoxy over such Western values as freedom, equality, and individualism. Liberty as such was never considered a political ideal in traditional Korean society; the goal was rule by a wise leader, not by law. (U)

Although traditional values are steadily loosening their hold on Koreans who are increasingly exposed to modernizing influences, even Koreans who have been educated abroad often find Western society excessively individualistic, competitive, and legalistic. Korean scholars close to the Pak government argue that Westerners should take into account the residual influences of traditional Korean culture in assessing South Korea today. (U)

President Pak's goal of rapidly modernizing South Korea and bringing it into the ranks of the world's industrialized states is, of course, anything but traditional. Where the Confucian ideal was to oppose change and to recapture a past golden age, Pak and his ruling group have moved aggressively to transform South Korea from its underdeveloped status in 1951 to recognition today as a "Newly Industrialized Country." In the past decade or so the South Korean economy has grown more rapidly than that of any other non-OPEC developing country. (U)

*President Pak's Goals and Tactics*



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*President Pak Chong-hui*

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Pak's modernization objective is tied closely to his goals of political stability and defense. Like many Third World leaders, Pak clearly believes that the stability that accompanies a strong, centralized national authority is required to mobilize resources for development. Pak also sees modernizing the South Korean economy as necessary for both the national and personal political survival. Fear of being outdistanced economically, and ultimately overwhelmed, by the North has given added impetus to South Korea's rapid economic growth. (C)

Pak's political tactics have combined coercion and conciliation. When faced with challenges from domestic dissidents, his initial response has been tough; he has avoided timing concessions in a way that might encourage additional demands. But when dissident pressures have eased, Pak has relaxed controls. Since the mid-1970s, the trend in Pak's policies has been cautiously to moderate the harsher practices of the internal security forces, and allow somewhat greater

leeway for opposition activity. This trend has accelerated since 1977, as Seoul has attempted to improve relations with the United States. Pak has not, however, withdrawn Emergency Measure 9 nor has he seriously considered any fundamental revision of the Yushin Constitution. (C)

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### *The Saemaul Movement*

Pak is pursuing a development strategy to strengthen his support in rural areas and to win more converts in the country's new urbanized middle class. One major reason for the strong political backing he enjoys in the countryside is the Saemaul (New Community) Movement. The program, launched in 1970 in an effort to revitalize the country's farming communities, has been remarkably successful. (U)

Pak himself comes from a rural background, and he has long demonstrated more personal empathy toward the conservative farmers than toward city dwellers. Even so, industrial development and the cities were given priority in the 1960s, when Pak and his associates began their drive to modernize Korea. Poverty remained widespread in many farm villages, and the gap between urban and rural living standards widened considerably. (U)

The Saemaul Movement was designed not only to reverse that trend but probably also to contribute to long-term security in the country. Pak was no doubt particularly sensitive about the security issue because of the rural-base guerrilla warfare in Vietnam in the late 1960s and North Korea's unsuccessful attempts at that time to generate an insurgency in the South. (C)

It is difficult to fit the Saemaul Movement neatly into an economic or political category. It includes both an economic development program that underwrites the government's presence throughout the rural areas, and an important moral-psychological component that features mass indoctrination campaigns to promote a mix of traditional and modern values. (U)

In economic terms, the most striking statistic attributed to the program by South Korean officials is the gain in average rural income from a level substantially below urban income in 1970 to virtual rural-urban parity in the mid-1970s. Projects inspired or endorsed by Saemaul—and supported by material and planning assistance by the central government cooperating with local authorities—include rural electrification; irrigation and flood control; the building of feeder roads, community storehouses, and schools; and the replacement of thatched roofs on private homes with permanent tile and metal roofing. (U)

Some government analysts point out that Saemaul in itself should not be given total credit for improvements in rural living standards. They contend that a variety of economic factors—including the introduction of new strains of high-yield "miracle rice," improved technology, the government's farm price supports, the expansion of agricultural extension services, and the increasingly affluent urban market for Korean farm produce—have also played key roles. (U)

Dissident intellectuals in Seoul are highly skeptical about the political dimension of the Saemaul Movement. They charge that it is essentially intended to strengthen the government's control and manipulation of the rural population. Indeed, in its early years government officials sometimes used heavyhanded tactics to meet certain goals and quotas set in Seoul. Recently, however, the farmers seem to have developed a generally positive view of Saemaul. 25X1C

The Saemaul Movement seems to have helped dispel the farming communities' traditional distrust of the central government. It has also created a new relationship between the farmers, who—albeit, still resenting outside interference—now look to the permanent Saemaul bureaucracy for practical assistance and economic benefits. (U) 25X1C

The government's effort to fashion an ideological basis for the Saemaul Movement is in part an attempt to counter criticisms that under Pak South Korea stands only for barren anti-Communism and materialism. Saemaul does not fill the ideological gap with a systematic political philosophy, but it does articulate a fairly coherent set of values. (U)

Saemaul lecturers extol traits and behavior highly valued in traditional Korean peasant society: the Saemaul motto is "Self-help, Cooperation, Diligence." Resistance to change is disparaged, and farmers are urged to accept new attitudes and values deemed essential to a modern society. These include

- Receptivity to new technology and agricultural methods.

- A rational, scientific approach to problem-solving.
- Saving money for investment in the future.
- A willingness to follow qualified leadership.
- A sense of nationalism, which attempts to broaden the concept of community to include the entire country. (U)

One longtime Western observer of Korean affairs notes, "The message is hardly more complicated than that everyone should work together under the leadership of President Pak in order to build a prosperous, secure nation." This kind of simplified doctrine does not satisfy the highly educated dissident leadership in Seoul, which demands a much broader range of political rights. Nonetheless, the Saemaul Movement's "updated Confucianism" seems to have acquired legitimacy in South Korea's rural areas, in large part through its association with higher living standards and solutions to practical problems. (U)

The government has attempted to extend the Saemaul Movement to Korea's cities and factories. The urban movement has been given substantial publicity but—aside from conservation and beautification projects, and limited progress toward a more paternalistic Japanese management model in industry—its impact has been slight. In any event, popular support for Saemaul is less enthusiastic in the cities, where people live and work in different locations, have less permanent roots, and still lack a sense of community. (C)

#### *Pak and the Middle Class*

Over the years, two groups have dominated the Korean political scene: the military, which seized and consolidated political control in the 1960s; and more recently, the civilian bureaucracy, whose role and influence has steadily expanded with Korean modernization. Continuing economic development is now giving rise to a new force in Korean politics, the middle class. As a "third elite," the middle class promises to have an increasing impact on Korean public affairs in the 1980s. (C)

The emergence of the middle class often has been seen as a potential problem for President Pak. Its growth has entailed an expansion in the country's university

student population, greater Korean exposure to Western political ideas, and growing popular demands on the government. These social changes have at times created new and difficult pressure points for the government, but in general, the South Korean middle class—particularly the business community—supports the Pak government. (C)

The Korean business and professional elite appears to believe that the environment created by President Pak is conducive to prosperity. In policy terms, Pak has not only provided political stability, but has also made credit available, protected domestic markets, furnished guidance to spur export growth and—until the past year at least—checked inflation. (C)

At the apex of the business establishment, Korea's largest conglomerates are still dominated by a dozen or so old-line entrepreneurs and their families—the Chungs of Hyundai, the Lees of Samsung, the Kims of Daewoo, and the Kus of Lucky. Needless to say, these families are well satisfied with the system. Still, the Korean business leadership corps is steadily being reinforced by a new cadre with a stake in the system. (C)

As a case in point, many military officers have made the transition to the business world. One recent study cited 160 retired army generals who are now presidents of companies or serving on boards of directors of private enterprises. Numerous government officials have also shifted to key positions in the private sector. Ministers and vice-ministers typically become chief executives of companies; one year, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry lost four division chiefs to the electronics and oil refining industries. Among top-ranked university graduates, meanwhile, industry has replaced government as the most favored employer. The major corporations increasingly are hiring college graduates through competitive examinations. (C)

There are signs that Korean businessmen sense that the day is coming when they will have greater influence and freedom to conduct their own affairs. Free enterprise is now held out as an ideal in Seoul, but the economy in fact is subject to overall management by government technocrats. Although government controls are more a matter of direction and guidance



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than a command system, Korea's business elite is beginning to chafe under the government's guidelines. Chung Ju-Yung, the outspoken chairman of the large Hyundai Group and head of the influential Federation of Korean Industries, recently said in public that the government should curb its "excessive involvement" in the details of production and distribution and instead concern itself with larger economic issues. (C)

It is conceivable that businessmen may join forces with South Korean dissidents in seeking to "liberalize" the country's politics as well as its economic format. Such a development, however, is still far down the road. For the present, neither of the major political parties is particularly business oriented. When businessmen, professionals, and other individual members of the Korean middle class do become more politicized, it is likely that they will favor a basically conservative party along Japanese lines, rather than one promoting the left-of-center views now evident among dissident intellectuals in Seoul. (C)

#### Outlook

President Pak has retained longstanding bases of support in the military and the bureaucracy, and in the 1970s he has strengthened his political equities with the rural population and with a significant part of South Korea's growing urban middle class. These groups generally share Pak's major goals—a stable political order, strong national defense, and the modernization of South Korea's economy and society. (C)



Pak has succeeded in building governmental institutions that mobilize and control people and resources —

Even so, the country's democratic and representative institutions—the national legislature,

the political parties, and the press—have little independence and are not widely respected. Their weaknesses in public regard could become significant if, for whatever reason, Pak or those around him should seek to transfer power to a new leader, something that has never happened peacefully in South Korea. (S NF)

Short of a succession crisis, other developments could spell trouble for President Pak. Maintaining strong economic growth almost certainly is one of the ingredients required to head off political unrest in South Korea's expanding urban areas. So far, economic growth seems to have largely absorbed the energies and also met many of the growing economic expectations of the large lower income urban population. Should there be a serious economic slowdown, however, the likelihood that this group would seek an alternative to President Pak could increase dramatically. (S NF)

South Korea's continued economic progress remains largely dependent on its ability to continue expanding exports which, in turn, will require it to move increasingly into higher technology industries in the years ahead. Seoul probably can make the transition, but it faces stiff international competition, increasing energy and raw material costs, and a high degree of dependence on overseas market conditions. (S NF)

Pak could also come under much heavier attack should he be seen as mishandling relations with the United States, which most Koreans regard as critical to the country's survival. In 1977, when US-ROK relations were strained as a result of nuclear weapons development plans in Korea, the US troop withdrawal policy, the Koreagate scandal, and the human rights issue, some South Korean generals began to grumble privately that Pak might not be the right man to have at the top. Pak took special pains to smooth out the relationship with the United States, terminating research on nuclear weapons, sending Tong-sun Park to Washington to testify, and releasing political prisoners. (S NF)

Pak remains sensitive to US interests, including those in the area of human rights; he is continuing to release political detainees periodically in order to improve the atmosphere for President Carter's visit this summer.

Pak may also consider repealing the much-criticized Emergency Measure 9 at some point, in the interest of improving ties with the United States, but he may be reluctant to take that step immediately prior to or following President Carter's 29 June visit to avoid appearing to bow to US pressure. In any event, the potential for significant difficulties in the US-ROK relationship remains. (S NF)

An alliance between South Korea's dissidents and the opposition New Democratic Party could also result in more effective pressures on the government, but Pak's adversaries will have to move with care. If they press hard Pak is almost certain to react with firmness, and in such a confrontation he is likely to come out the winner. (S NF)

President Pak will probably continue to aim for a mix of tactical concessions and controls which will be sufficient to dampen any challenges from his critics, but still not so onerous as to provoke them unduly. Over the longer term, Pak himself seems well aware that demands for greater political participation and freedoms will intensify, and he has strongly implied in public addresses that a more fundamental liberalization will be possible when security conditions permit. At the same time, he has asserted that South Korea should not simply imitate Western political institutions, but rather should adapt them in a manner suited to Korea's traditions and culture. (S NF)

Thus, in spite of the undercurrents of dissatisfaction, Pak's political style is generally in line with Korean tradition, and he has substantial assets in terms of bases of support, institutional development, and political-economic programs that make it likely that he will be able to hold on to power into the 1980s. (S NF)

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